

western plains north green wedge management plan

consultation summary & response

hansen partnership

january 2014



urban planning | urban design | landscape architecture



contents

1	introduction.....	1
1.1	the vision and community views report	1
1.2	consultation to date.....	1
2	feedback.....	2
2.1	consultation events and survey results	2
2.2	stakeholder response survey results	3
2.3	suggestions and other comments	5
3	proposed response	9

version	title	date	issuer
1	consultation and response summary	03.01.2014	david barnes
2	consultation and response summary	14.01.2014	david barnes

1 introduction

This consultation and response summary has been prepared by Hansen Partnership as part of the *Green Wedge Management Plan*, for the Western Plains North Green Wedge project.

The report summarises feedback from the second major consultation event held as part of this project. The feedback received is in relation to the *Vision and Community Views Report* that was exhibited between 21 October and 5 November 2013.

The report also provides recommendations and comments for consideration in the draft Western Plains North Green Wedge Management Plan, that will be prepared as the final part of this project.

1.1 the vision and community views report

This *Consultation and Response Summary* identifies feedback that has been provided on a report issued to the public entitled *Vision and Community Views Report*. That report documented the views expressed through consultation around the *Background Report* and issues current within the Western Plains North Green Wedge. It documented the responses received to a community survey which was distributed to landowners and key stakeholders, as well as views expressed through drop in sessions and other forums.

On the basis of that feedback, and the background investigations outlined within the *Background Report*, the key values within the Green Wedge area were identified. Following that, the key issues identified in the *Background Report* were reiterated and supplemented with emerging issues which came out during consultation.

The second part of the *Vision and Community Views Report* outlined a proposed 'vision', corresponding objectives and potential strategies under three key themes of 'people', 'use of the land' and 'the environment'.

1.2 consultation to date

The first major consultation event for this project was held in May 2013, to seek background information on issues that currently exist within the Green Wedge. The sessions held on that day provided the opportunity for a wide range of community and other key stakeholders to provide the consultant team with their thoughts on what the key issues within the Green Wedge are currently,

what they value about the area, and any ideas they have for its future management.

During the second consultation period, a series of consultation sessions were held on 7th November 2013 at the Toolern Vale Hall. Details of those sessions are below:

- A Conservation and Waterways session from 11am – 12pm
- A Planning and Agriculture session from 1 – 2pm
- A community / landowner session from 3.30 – 5.30pm
- A community / landowner session from 6.30 - 8.30pm

Community events in particular were well attended, with many residents who had not attended the first consultation event participating through the second event.

The sessions began with a brief overview of the contents of the *Vision and Community Views Report*, and some general questions, before participants broke into smaller groups facilitated by members of the project team. Each group reviewed the objectives which had been developed as part of the 'vision' and discussed which of these they supported and which were considered to be of concern.

Group discussions also raised issues or opportunities that may not have been picked up through the documentation of existing community concerns, an example of which was the management of kangaroos within the Green Wedge.

The key discussion points from each table were then documented and relayed back to the group as a whole to allow an understanding of the key threads and discussion points that occurred throughout the room.

The discussion at each table was facilitated and supported by a 'response form' which allowed individuals to identify their individual level of support, as well as participate in the collective discussion. These responses are detailed in the following section of this summary.

2 feedback

This chapter outlines the feedback that was received through consultation on the *Vision and Community Views* paper as detailed previously. Over 70 response forms were received by Council, along with a number of other more detailed submissions.

2.1 consultation events and survey results

In general, feedback regarding the *Vision and Community Views Report* commented that the report representing a good summary of the views expressed in previous consultation events.

The feedback was also generally positive regarding the proposed overarching objectives that will underpin the Management Plan, although some comments did note the very broad nature of the objectives. The intent of the objectives was to ensure the plan was on the right track in terms of the matters it would pursue, and the feedback received has confirmed this to be the case.

Comments were also made about the need for greater emphasis on the importance of conservation and management of biodiversity within the study area, and a desire on the part of landowners for some form of support in recognition of the work they undertake to this end.

In relation to the identified vision, the general consensus was that it was broadly appropriate, with a number of stakeholders identifying that how the vision is implemented will be the key matter. Comments received in relation to the vision included:

- The need for the plan to be specific not general.
- Concern about the use of the word 'discrete' and how that would be determined.
- Views that the Green Wedge should not be used to accommodate urban uses, if it is not considered to be 'urban' in any other way, and questions over what 'urban' uses would need a 'rural' environment.
- A suggestion was also made at the drop in session that the word 'expansive' was perhaps too broad and should be reconsidered.

Through the surveys distributed at the consultation events it was confirmed that there was generally strong community support for the objectives as identified. Those responses are outlined in more detail in the following section. The responses provide a solid evidence base of stakeholder support in taking the identified objectives forward.



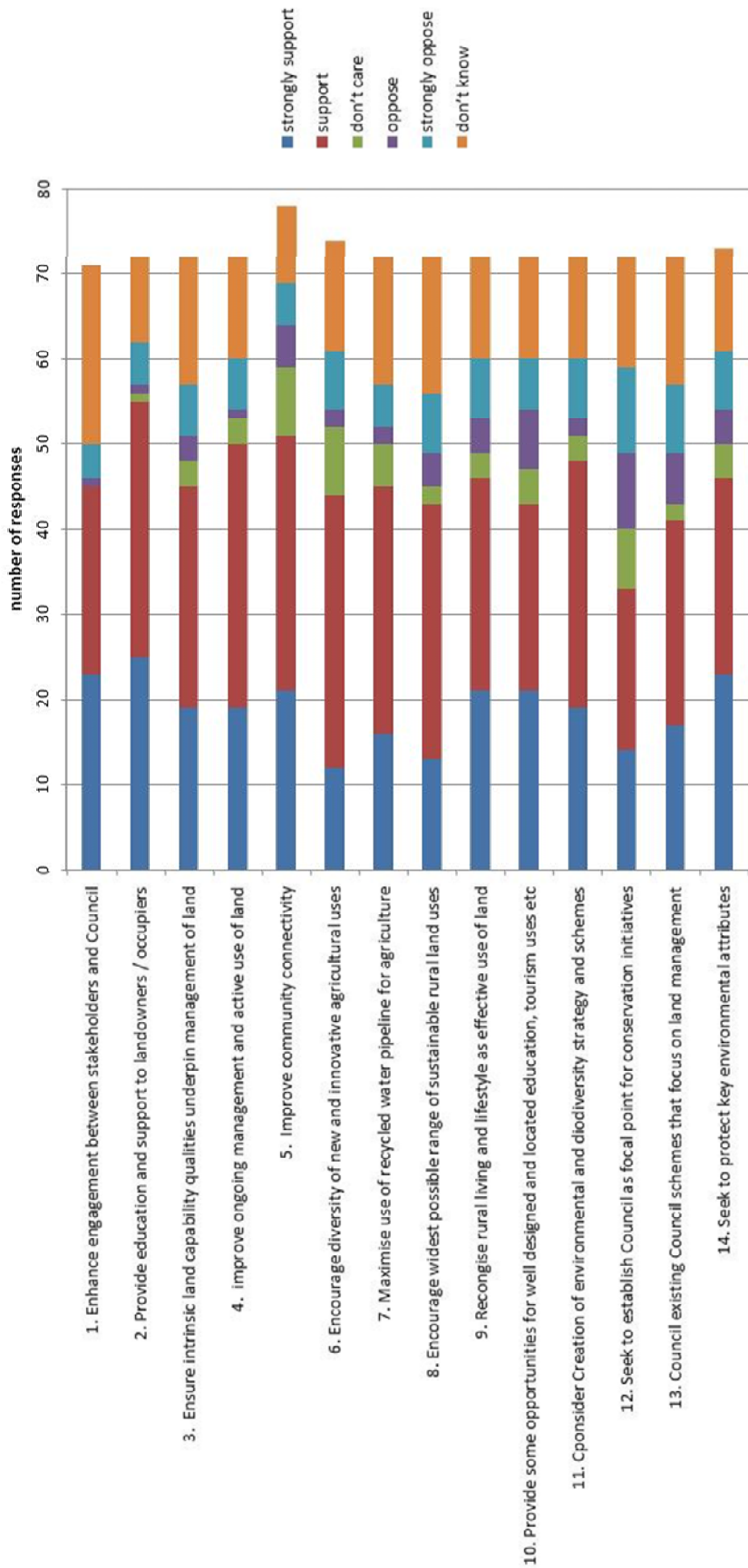
2.2 stakeholder response survey results

A summary of the results from the survey that was distributed at the consultation events and made available by Council is outlined below. The results included in the table (below) are graphically represented in a chart on the following page. The table and chart is followed by a brief outline of the implications of the results.

The first part of the survey sought to gauge the level of support for the objectives outlined in the *Vision and Community Views Report*

No.	Question	strongly support	support	don't care	oppose	strongly oppose	don't know
1	Enhance engagement between landowners, stakeholders and Council regarding ongoing management of the green wedge	23	22	0	1	4	21
2	Provide education and support to landowners / occupiers and better align reasons why people own / live in the green wedge	25	30	1	1	5	10
3	Ensure intrinsic land capability, qualities and values of the land underpin the long term management of the green wedge	19	26	3	3	6	15
4	Improve the ongoing management and appropriately active use of land	19	31	3	1	6	12
5	Improve community connectivity	21	30	8	5	5	9
6	Encourage a diversity of new and innovative agricultural uses	12	32	8	2	7	13
7	Maximise opportunities for agriculture associated with the recycled water pipeline	16	29	5	2	5	15
8	Encourage the widest possible range of rural and related uses to provide a long term, sustainable, land management outcome	13	30	2	4	7	16
9	Recognise rural living and rural lifestyle, in conjunction with a part time agricultural and / or conservations uses, as an effective use of land	21	25	3	4	7	12
10	Provide some opportunities for educational, recreational, institutional and other tourism and urban related uses – provided well designed and located	21	22	4	7	6	12
11	Consider the creation of environmental and biodiversity strategies and schemes which both celebrate and actively improve environmental values and assets within the green wedge	19	29	3	2	7	12
12	Seek to establish Council as the focal point for conservation initiatives in the green wedge	14	19	7	9	10	13
13	Continue existing Council schemes which focus on land management within the green wedge	17	24	2	6	8	15
14	Seek to protect key environmental attributes within the green wedge	23	23	4	4	7	12

summary of response to objectives



The results show that the majority of respondents either 'supported' or 'strongly supported' the objectives. Objectives around seeking to 'protect the environmental attributes', 'improvement of management and appropriately active use of the land' and 'enhanced engagement between landowners and the Council', generated the strongest support. Whilst opposition to the objectives was fairly minimal, the least support was expressed in relation to the 'establishment of Council as a focal point for conservation initiatives in the green wedge'.

The second part of the survey asked for thoughts on the 'vision', whether the report provided an accurate summary of the views expressed in previous consultation events, and any other ideas or suggestions that respondents had for the area. The responses were similar to those outlined in the previously section.

2.3 suggestions and other comments

Some of the specific comments and suggestions provided in both the response form and also in accompanying submissions that were lodged with Council, are outlined below. Key themes have been identified followed by specific ideas and suggestions.

environment

One of the key themes to emerge was around the issue of biodiversity and the protection of environmental assets. Comments made included the following:

- Need to have more focus on conservation of flora and fauna, and biodiversity must have the highest priority.
- Maintaining areas for native vegetation should be a priority.
- Wildlife corridors are important and should be carefully planned to ensure they are of sufficient size and in the right locations to generate potential benefits.
- Biodiversity must consider waterway health and water catchments must be protected.
- The language around the protection of the environment needs to be stronger, at the moment it is too vague. Broad statements on conservation and environment aren't useful – aspirations need to be detailed and practical.
- The entire Djerriwarrh Creek corridor should be protected. The plan should look at this corridor as a whole.

- Potential subsidies for biodiversity outcomes should be explored, so people are rewarded for good work as well as just meeting their obligations to control weeds.
- Better databases are needed – much of the current understanding comes from surveys done in the drought, which may be misleading.
- More education on the value of native grasslands is needed as there is a lack of understanding about its value. People do not see it as important as trees.
- Development should require the use of indigenous species through any development to build resilience i.e. planting silver banksias rather than cypresses.

subdivision

Another key theme that emerged was in relation to the subdivision of land and / or the urbanisation of the green wedge. There are three key groups in terms of aspirations for the green wedge area.

1. The first group would like to see the land used for urban purposes and seeks either rezoning of land or movement of the urban growth boundary to allow this to occur.
2. The second group does not want to see any change occur and believes it is important to retain larger lots to ensure future uses of the land are not compromised.
3. The last group sits between these first two and seeks to retain the 'rural' environment but sees further subdivision occurring to allow for more rural residential development (primarily on the basis that this will result in improved land management outcomes).

The majority of submissions were from the last group, although there were divergent views on what subdivision size should be pursued. Some of the key themes raised in relation to this issue included the following.

The need to keep larger lots:

- Keep land in larger lots as we may need the land in the future.
- The retention of larger lots allows for the establishment of different kinds of enterprises which may be compromised by further subdivision. Uses such as Buddhist retreats are already occurring on larger lots.
- A number of respondents were against subdivision of land and flagged the importance of not placing too much weight on the loud 'minority'.

The viability of farming:

- Subdivision of land will lead to an increase in hobby farmers who are often poor land managers due to their lack of knowledge about farming.
- The climate and the changeable weather, in particular rainfall, in the area also make farming difficult.
- No-one will be left to share farm soon and the maintenance issue will become greater.
- Suggestions about the size of lots that would be suitable ranged from 5 acres to 25 acres, (2-10ha) with the majority of suggestions for 10 or 25 acres (4 -10ha).
- Where agriculture does occur it will be in combination with other income streams, which affects the time people have to devote to maintaining land.
- Added difficulties in relation to traditional farming in the area include the high cost of controlling weed infestations, the presence of large amounts of scattered subsurface rock, and years of soil degradation from wind erosion and other sources.
- Productive agriculture is too hard and is unviable, particularly due to decreasing commodity prices. Therefore the land is not good for anything other than rural residential development.

Rural residential development:

- There is a need for 'lifestyle' lots.
- Subdivision was seen as allowing for succession planning and for the retention of families within the green wedge. Reference was also made to the aging population within the green wedge who may want to subdivide to fund retirement and / or can no longer manage their land.
- Rural residential development would give the land a purpose and allow for hobby farming.
- Smaller lots are easier to maintain and therefore lead to better land management outcomes.
- A number of references were made to the type of rural residential development allowed in Macedon Ranges Shire, to the immediate north of the study area, as being the type of development that would be suitable in the area.

Concerns about urbanisation:

- The cost implications of allowing additional subdivision, and therefore residents, in terms of the infrastructure that is present within the area and the potential impact of additional traffic, people etc, particularly in terms of the cost of providing this infrastructure.

- Strong concerns were expressed against the 'urbanisation' of the green wedge given the reason many residents chose to live there would be compromised.

Transition between urban and rural environments:

- Others (generally closer to Melton or Hillside) have been seeking their land to be rezoned to allow urban development and many submissions commented on the changing policy position, which is frustrating for landowners.
- The area up to MacPherson Park was seen as an area that should be developed more intensely, if not with urban uses then at least with additional subdivision.
- Additional subdivision around MacPherson Park was seen as leading to better public transport outcomes and increased use of facilities.
- Others don't agree with development up to MacPhersons Park and believe it should remain as it is.
- Suggestions were made that Council use larger lots to buffer the urban area, then allow additional subdivision for rural residential development beyond that.
- Others suggested an opposite approach, whereby smaller lots are allowed at the urban edge as a transition to rural areas with larger lots.
- Support for buffer of rural / conservation land between Melton and Gisborne.

Area specific matters:

- Queries over the impact on rates of any rezoning or changes to the subdivision potential of land.
- Construction of a new bridge over Toolern Creek in Minns Road, to better connect to Ryans Lane.



connectivity

One of the other key themes that came through both the response forms and the consultation events, was the management of roads and future movement and connections through the study area. Some of the key discussion points included:

Capacity of roads:

- Any future decision on subdivision needs to think about increases in traffic.
- There are existing issues with traffic in terms of speed, dust and dangerous intersections with Melton Highway.
- Potential for speed limits to be imposed on unmade roads to reduce impact of dust and improve safety.

Public transport:

- Issues around the provision of public transport to, and the need for connections to improve usage and access to, MacPherson Park.
- Other comments more generally related to public transport in terms of the lack of transport available within the area, in contrast to other comments which sought additional subdivision on the basis of proximity to the Digger's Rest train station.

Off road trails:

- Support for the development of community tracks and trails through the area, but concern that these may be provided on private land and about how Council would acquire and maintain these trails.
- More specifically there was support for horse trails and concern about the potential for increase in trail biking.

land management

Many of the submissions and discussions at the consultation sessions also addressed a variety of other land management issues, including:

- The need for more fire prevention measures to be taken, both in relation to the management of the Lerderberg State Park in the north-west (including burning off) and also the management of roadside vegetation
- Maintaining of roadsides in particular was raised.
- As well as concern with the management of fire risk in relation to the State Park, there were also concerns raised that weeds were coming in from State owned land, making management of private land more difficult.

- More broadly, significant concern was expressed over the level of weed infestation in some areas of the green wedge.
- The issue of wildlife management had not been raised previously but the number of kangaroos came up in a number of forums. In particular there were requests for a plan to manage the increasing number of kangaroos given the potential damage caused, particularly along creek lines.

recycled water

Comments were also made on the recycled water pipeline, with the current situation being outlined in more detail and suggestions being made about needs to happen to increase the use of this water. Comments can generally be summarised as follows:

- Concern over the cost of recycled water and the fact that unless costs are reduced it will not be used.
- General acknowledgement that the costs are too high for broad acre agricultural uses but may be suitable for more high income agricultural uses.
- Suggestions to facilitate greater access to recycled water to bring down costs, including the formation of groups of neighbouring landowners to increase demand.
- Suggestions for smaller subdivision sizes, which may be more suitable for more intensive uses, responding to the access to water.
- Another concern with the recycled water was the perception that consistent supply could not be assured.

information sharing

In line with the above suggestion for lots to use the recycled water, there were also a number of other suggestions for how education and the sharing of information should be improved, and suggestions to use 'local champions' and to develop a 'peri-urban farmers network' to increase support and to share information.

urban uses

As identified in an earlier section, reference to 'urban' related uses within the 'vision' was identified as an area of concern.

Specific comments reiterated the lack of support for the green wedge in helping the urban areas by accommodating large scale uses. Schools and churches were of particular concern in relation to the traffic impacts. There were also queries about how

Council would be able to determine what is 'discretely' located.

tourism

Other suggestions from the consultation session and responses included identification of opportunities to increase tourism uses and better recognition of heritage values (dry stone walls, volcanic stone buildings).

governance

Another key thread of comments and feedback related to governance:

- The role of the State Government in the area with two key themes emerging strongly from resident's comments and feedback. The first related to perceptions of the State Government's lack of care for the area, specifically its failure to take responsibility and to adequately fund or monitor land management responsibilities. The other key criticism of the State Government was the impact on the green wedge due to inconsistencies in decision making and the difficulties that repeated changes to the urban growth boundary create in promoting appropriate land management.
 - The consistency of Council decision making was also raised, especially in relation to areas closest to the urban edge of Melton that were subject to assessment through the Logical Inclusions process.
 - Changes to the municipal boundary with Macedon Ranges were also suggested, to better reflect land characteristics and the fact the physical conditions were more aligned with those in Macedon Ranges.
 - Suggestions that rates need to be lower in recognition of the costs of maintaining land within the green wedge area – particularly for larger parcels; if they are over a certain size should get additional support.
 - Funding and implementation of all parts of the Management Plan need to be considered. Council should undertake a cost benefit assessment of paths or other proposals before undertaking them.
 - Some feedback also flagged implications of land sizes and the ability to subdivide on other income streams, such as the ability to access pensions etc.
-

3 proposed response

As with previous consultation events there were competing views expressed (to urbanise the area, to retain it as is, or to change it to rural residential). Balancing these competing interests is a difficult task. However, recognition of the intended purpose of the land makes this somewhat easier.

The Management Plan is being prepared to 'manage' the green wedge as a *green wedge*. It is not concerned with issues regarding changes to the urban growth boundary or the suitability of land for urban development. That is a matter of concern for the State government. Recent indications through documents such as Plan Melbourne, point to an increased recognition of the need for certainty around the permanency of the Urban Growth Boundary. It is understood that mechanisms to permanently 'set' the urban growth boundary are underway and that a review of the current boundary will form part of that process. As such, any feedback or issues raised in relation to the rezoning of land or the movement of the urban growth boundary, should be referred to that process and are not appropriate to be addressed by this Management Plan.

The issue of whether the management of the land is best facilitated through an adjustment to current subdivision controls is a matter for the management plan to consider. However, it is important to note that this consideration will relate only to matters concerning the management of the land, rather than any perceived demand for particular housing types etc. Those considerations are subject to a different manner of study.

From the feedback received through the consultation, it is clear that the proposed objectives are generally seen as suitable to underpin the preparation of the Management Plan. The community and other key stakeholders will have further opportunities to provide feedback once the details of the strategies are fleshed out.

In response to the submissions and feedback received during this second phase on consultation, the following broad changes are suggested.

- Some additional refinement of the precincts is suggested. In particular Area 3 should be split along the Djerriwarrh Creek corridor and a separate precinct should be created along the Djerriwarrh Creek corridor between existing Precincts 1 and 4.
- Precinct 2 should be split along the Diggers Rest – Coimadai Road to reflect the changes in topography.

- It is also considered that there may be merit in recognising areas along the urban interface (i.e. up to MacPherson Park and including the Ryan's Lane / Finches Road area in a separate precinct which recognises the 'urban interface' and the slightly different policy response and management outcomes that may be associated with these areas. Precinct 5 should therefore be expanded to recognise all these areas.
- Greater emphasis on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity.
- A clear explanation is provided of the role of the Management Plan and its relationship (or not) to broader State government changes in relation to the urban growth boundary.
- Some minor tweaks to the wording of the 'vision' to ensure clarity.

It is also considered that the following suggestions or ideas have merit in being further considered in the formulation of the Management Plan:

- The need for additional data collection to be undertaken in relation to flora and fauna. Identifying where the gaps are in the current information is likely to be the first stage.
- Investigation of options for a peri-urban farmer's network, and further consideration of mechanisms such as 'local heroes' to celebrate and share information around agriculture.
- Consideration of the appropriate width for biodiversity corridors and recommendations for potential areas for their application.
- Work with other parties such as the State government, Catchment Management Authority and Melbourne Water.
- Consideration of other measures that could improve biodiversity, such as the use of indigenous vegetation subsidies or other financial incentives.
- The management of roadside vegetation in relation to fire risk and biodiversity, both by Council and other land managers such as VicRoads.
- Investigation of the best way to manage the resident kangaroo population.
- Further investigation into how the current road system impacts or influences management and use of the green wedge.
- Further investigation into the visual sensitivity of areas of the green wedge, to determine appropriate siting or design controls to guide policy discretion.

- Additional detailed consideration about the options for agricultural uses that may be appropriate given the characteristics of the land and the decline of traditional broad acre farming within the area.
 - Need for consideration of more localised conditions in assessing proposals, through different outcomes for different precincts.
 - Revision of current subdivision formula within area A, of the GWZ which is not providing optimal outcomes, and is associated with some difficulty in application.
 - Consideration of funding and implementation measures to ensure the cost / benefit of suggested changes to management are considered.
-

